



The Aiki Dojo

道の為、世の為、人の為、合気道

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Happy October!

Without striking, be struck.
 Without waiting to receive a strike, be struck.
 Without avoiding being struck, be struck.
 Don't use strength; be supple.
 Be gentle and make good relations with your partner.
 Maintain a beautiful posture.
 Let your *zanshin* linger and persist.
 – Moriiji Mochida Kendo 10th Dan, Hanshi

In Aikido, we are never supposed to be static. Even when we are standing still, we are still supposed to be in motion. In *budo*, this might be thought of as *zanshin* (残心) or the “remaining mind.” *Zanshin* is usually thought of as one's posture and focus *after* the execution of the technique.

To a beginner, it might just seem like standing still at the end of the technique. In class, the teacher might say, “Don't forget *zanshin*” when the student absentmindedly walks away from the ending of the technique. For beginners, teachers want to see that they can hold the posture and focus after the technique is finished. Later, as one becomes more experienced, holding the end posture is not necessary because one can see from the outside that the focus never wanes or ends.

Zanshin then becomes an all the time thing that we walk around with all day. *Zanshin* is the junction where our minds meet our bodies or where focus meets form. To the uninitiated, *zanshin* can just look like we are posing, but what it really pertains to is the movement of our minds.

Generally speaking, our bodies can never be static. Every cell, particle and molecule in our bodies is in constant dynamic motion. At any point, if any of these motions were to stop, then disease will fester, we could become sick and possibly even die. Our bodies may be hardwired to be constantly in motion, but our minds are not.

For some reason or another, our minds tend to get bound up with one thought. We tend to ruminate on events, interactions or other negative things. In Chinese medicine, it is thought that a mind that becomes hyper focused on one thought or emotion can lead to the cultivation of diseases. This is the reason why we need to “practice” *zanshin* because our minds are always seeking to be in a static state.

The monk, Takuan Soho referred to this static state as an abiding mind. He advised the famous swordsman, Yagyu Munenori to achieve a state called the non-abiding mind where it does not seek to control or stop one thought but allow it flow by unin-

dered. Thus, Yagyu's mind wouldn't become infatuated with one thought or attack and he wouldn't get defeated. A flowing state of mind in Buddhism is called equanimity where one learns to observe and not become attached to any one thought.

Someone once said, “Life is simple, people are complicated.” Humans are complicated because our minds become static. Examples of static states of thinking are fear, judgment, anxiety,

anger or jealousy. Static minds are just minds that have lost their *zanshin*. Things like fear tend to be static and rooted while things like love tend to be flowing and dynamic.

After a certain point in our training, our movements and minds are supposed to become *shinshin* (心身) or a singular “mind-body” unit. Supposedly, when that happens we automatically become one with the universe. When we can achieve this state then our mind and body can move as one in a dynamic and flowing state. In Aikido, we call this *ki no nagare* (氣の流れ) or “the flow of ki.”

When our minds and bodies are one and we are in a flow state then outwardly we seem calm regardless of the situation. This

calm state is emblematic of the aikidoist. In an interview, 3rd Doshu, Mori Ueshiba touched upon this when he said, “When you practice and your mind is still or in *mushin* (無心) your movements are spontaneous and [you're] in [a] premeditated silence almost a state of nothingness [and] being combined with the universe. The Founder referred to this as *sumikiri* (澄み切り) or being [in] a state of stillness or a clear state of mind. *Sumikiri* is reached through [the] practice of using *mushin* and concentration.”

Beginners should first practice maintaining the *zanshin* at the end of their techniques but as they become more experienced then they should try to manage the *zanshin* throughout technique. Later on, as experts they will eventually be able to walk around in *zanshin* all day.

Author, James Redfield said, “Where Attention goes Energy flows; Where Intention goes Energy flows!” In *zanshin*, it is not that the mind remains but that our energy flows and our minds and bodies don't become static. When we have *zanshin*, we are able to meet any confrontation with poise and the sense of calmness of an aikidoist. O'Sensei said, “Foster peace in your own life and then apply the Art to all that you encounter.” Therefore, through Aikido training, we are able to achieve *zanshin* and with *zanshin*, we are able to have the wherewithal to have regard for all life and manifest O'Sensei's philosophy of Aiki. “Let your *zanshin* linger and persist!”



Zanshin



by David Ito
 Aikido Chief Instructor



*Yaki-tachi wo saya ni osamete,
masumasu masurao no kokoro wo togarikeri.*
Keep your tempered sword in its scabbard;
first polish a heart of courage.

– Old Samurai maxim

In the martial arts, it is commonly thought, “Practice the technique first, then polishes your spirit.” This comes from an old Miyamoto Musashi quote, “It takes 1,000 days to forge the spirit and 10,000 days to polish it.” When I started practicing Aikido, I remember that it seemed very interesting to me how one could negotiate the grabs and attacks while hardly using any physical strength. I also remember that despite being excited to learn this martial art, I also felt very lost.

I know that is the usual feeling every person has when they take their first steps in something new. I had experience in the practice of other martial arts like judo and karate and was able to copy the movements of martial art, and copy in a certain way what the teacher showed. However, once I began Aikido, I instantly recognize that for my level, the explanations my teacher, Furuya Sensei gave were totally incomprehensible and I could not “do” what he advised me to do. Some of the words or concepts he taught seemed foreign and I did not understand the relationship between the words like *ki*, unity, energy,

universe, etc with the movements that he was trying to do with his hands and feet.

When Sensei corrected me, his corrections were accompanied by a lot of information about the Art of Aikido. He would say things like, “you have to unite your center with your opponent’s” or “align ourselves with the universe.” I thought maybe there was a language problem since he only spoke English and

Japanese and I only spoke Spanish and a little English. Regardless, I had no idea and although I was trying to understand I did not know exactly

what he was trying to correct to improve the execution of the technique.



by Santiago Garcia Almaraz
Chief Instructor, Aikido Kodokai

My confused feelings lasted for a few years but I made an effort to read, and watch videos to understand Aikido history and its philosophies. As the years went by, I began to understand Aikido’s fundamentals and although some ideas were clearer and the technical parts or my movements were easier, I still didn’t “understand” Aikido any better. I knew I needed to understand the relationship between

my action and the reaction of my partner so that I could continue to evolve my understanding between being able to do things, feel things and control the result.

Continued on page 6...



For the student, the word “no” doesn’t belong in traditional training. Of course, this doesn’t mean that the students blindly follow whatever the teacher tells them, but on the other hand, it’s easy to think a little too much and make it easy to say “no.” Some of us, like me, would say “no” to mushrooms on pizza, while others would say “Yes, please!” Others feel the same way about pineapple on a pizza. All of us have our own preferences.

In improvisational comedy, one main rule is that when an idea is suggested to participants, they must follow that particular suggestion and work with it. They are not allowed to say “no.” In improvisational comedy, the word “no” signals an end to the creative process.

As students, there are probably many things that we don’t particularly enjoy in training. We all want to get strong in Aikido and not waste our time with some basic technique that we practiced some time ago as a beginner. Maybe, to make things interesting, we want to resist our partner’s technique, maybe we don’t like the cleaning up after class, or maybe we think we just know better. Often, there are basics that we would much rather not spend all of our time practicing. Where’s the fancy stuff? Where are all the cool techniques?

As instructors, there are also probably many other things we’d rather teach than the basics. After all, we want to make strong students. Sometimes we let our ego loose and they want to show

everyone how much they know and how skillful they are when they share the secrets of the universe with everyone. Besides, teaching the basics is too boring!

Don’t Say No



by **Ken Watanabe**
Technical Director

Both of these cases involve our ego. In both of these examples, both students and teachers are just thinking of themselves and their own feelings and what they want. Students and teachers who haven’t trained enough always want to practice and teach whatever they feel like practicing and teaching regardless of its benefits. It’s so easy to say “no” and take the path that’s more appealing or gratifying.

All of us have techniques we like practicing and techniques that give us trouble. We all have aspects of the training that we enjoy and aspects of the training that we don’t like. There are also techniques that we have practiced that we feel are useful and other techniques that make us wonder if we are practicing a martial art at all.

Nevertheless, whether or not we like it or we don’t like it; whether or not we are bad at it or we are good at it, it is important to have a spirit of going forward when training. It is easy to dismiss some part of the training before we even give it a chance. It’s easy to rationalize how we know better. Does this mean it’s better to follow the teaching blindly? Yes and also, no.

Good students follow their teacher, but they shouldn't follow blindly. A good student still questions – how, why, when, and what. Without this curiosity we only end up parroting the movements. This is how most people view traditional training. Traditional training is much more involved than just watching and copying; that is just the beginning. From following the teaching closely and faithfully, then thoughtfully trying to make sense of what we are practicing, we can begin to see what is important for our training and what is just decoration. This cycle of watching, copying, practicing, listening, revisiting, and then going back and thinking about the technique in a logical and reasonable way may take years before it actually pays off. If we say “no” from the beginning, where does it take us in our training? Most likely, nowhere.

It's up to the consistency of practice to reveal this. Some answers are easy to uncover, while others require more time – sometimes years of practice before the answer we are seeking, and usually it is right in front of us the whole time, “reveals” itself to us.

A student can never know how and when an answer to their questions will reveal itself. One day, we might see the technique differently than other days. Maybe our teachers might mention that one point of view we never considered. Perhaps our partner's bad *ukemi* forces us to re-evaluate how we do the technique. Did we practice the technique too hard or too fast? Use too much strength? On the way to finding the answer, we can still learn something valuable. The learning is the process.

Because of this, in traditional training, it is important to follow one's teacher with the same spirit as if we trusted them with our lives, but before doing that there is a more important thing to remember: we must find a good teacher. From here everything falls into place.

In my own training, I tried following the instructions the best I could. However, there were many parts of the training I didn't understand. How would I use this on the street? What if the opponent did this? Many times I couldn't understand “the why”, much less “the how.”

At the time, my level of training only allowed me to see the practice from my own beginner's viewpoint. It wasn't until I had enough training and refined my basics that my body finally

caught up with what my mind knew intellectually. Through practice, and questioning, and following the training set forth by my own teacher, I finally answered many of my questions on my own – years after he had passed away. If I had said “no” to any aspect of the training, I do not think I could have continued to refine my practice.



In our dojo we hang an *anoren* which is a kind of short cloth curtain in the entryway. On it are three images: a sickle or “kama,” a circle representing a bowl or “wan” and the hiragana script for “nu.” These three images come together to mean “Kamawanu” which translates as, “it doesn't matter” or “we don't care.” This verse was popular with martial art schools in ancient times. When a dojo hangs this up, what it says to other martial artists is, “it doesn't matter” how strong you are and “it doesn't matter” so come right on in! The martial artist of old cares not whether the person chooses to train here or not and whatever is fine by us. What this implies is that the dojo would not shrink from any challengers, nor would they welcome them. The dojo will simply deal with them appropriately.

Likewise, in our training, we must often deal with many different parts of practice and that some of those elements may not agree with us. It's easy to say “no” to these challenges instead of forging

ahead and seeing what happens when we apply ourselves to training. It's easy to want the instant answer.

When writing this article, I researched the kanji for *kamawanu*. I could've simply left it alone, but I was curious, because the essence of a Japanese word is often in its kanji or Chinese ideographic character. From this tiny bit of research I learned that the root for the word *kamawanu* is “kama” which is the same character for *kamae* (構) or our martial arts stance.

In training and in doing, maybe we won't find the answers we want but we will always discover something of value if we apply ourselves. Traditional training can seem stiff and very dogmatic, and there are parts of the training that can be like that. Most times we only hear “no” from our teacher's mouth but that admonishment isn't meant to be a put down or derogatory. The teacher's “no” is a call to arms that, ultimately, makes us strong enough to say, “Yes!” •



Forge First, Polish Second *continued from page 3...*

Those first few years were bittersweet because I really learned what I didn't know and I realized I really wanted to know more. After three years of training on my own, I decided to go a little further, so put on my backpack and traveled to Los Angeles to study under Rev. Kensho Furuya. When I found Sensei, it was like finding a Student's Aikido dictionary. From our first meeting, I was amazed at how concise and clear his explanations were. He would turn something that I was having a difficulty in and struggling with into a simple straight forward concept. Sensei would just watch me do Aikido and say something simple like, "turn more here and move your back foot there," "more Irimi," "project your power at this point" or "Keep your back straight." His corrections and explanations were so easy that he made it easy to learn Aikido. I felt that my first month training with him eclipsed my first three years training without him.

I suppose that this type of scenario is the natural process of learning first you learn the mechanical part of the technique where to position yourself, how to put your hands etc. Only after repeating the proper technical many times does it become unconscious and we begin to evolve to another level in the technique. After that point, questions about timing, space, and some doubts begin to clear up as we begin to understand certain concepts that were incomprehensible to us before. Finally perhaps after many many years we understand the relationship between Aikido movements with other types of forces and also we learn more about Aikido and its connection with more philosophical or spiritual concepts.

I think that Aikido pedagogy has evolved a lot since O'Sensei's time and, maybe even more so, during this time of pandemic. In Aikido, throughout one's journey but especially the first few years it is essential to learn how our bodies move in the most appropriate and effective way for each technique.

In my case, I remember that one of the most important discoveries was how to move my body from the hip. I remember that whenever I practiced Tenkan-kokyu ho, I was unable to move if the uke firmly grabbed my wrist. I struggled because I was trying to rotate without first moving forward enough in Irimi and didn't positioning myself correctly before turning my hips and aligning myself next to my opponent. Now and after many years, I still continue to practice and try and refine this basic exercise. Learned that I have to move forward deeply because someone enlightened me to that part of the problem in my technique and then taught me how to do it correctly. If Sensei hadn't told me all those years ago, then I might still be struggling today. I think that in my case it would have been impossible to evolve in Aikido without knowing the mechanics of the techniques first.

Aikido is very deep and each technique has many layers. Some are physical while some others are philosophical or spiritual. In order to get to the deep end of Aikido we have to start with the basic physical concepts of the Art. Aikido is a very technical martial art that prides itself on free flowing movement but that freedom won't appear when you do it for the first time. It will only appear after we have mastered the physical basics. Aikido is an art of pure movement, when we watch the videos of the Founder and see him move from one side to the other, we might mistakenly think that we can do that in the beginning too. However, it is quite the opposite, we can move like O'Sensei after we have practiced his way of moving.

At our level, we need to first embody the basic principles of Aikido movement which means that the *kihon-waza* will evolve into a good base which will become the basis for learning Aikido at a deeper level.

So no matter how tedious or boring each repetition may seem, know that this is how we forge the keys that will open the future doors on your way to mastering Aikido. •

If we are not too careful in our Aikido practice, we can wind up like most people today who are a bit lost and only simply practice a mish-mash of Aikido techniques. Unsuspecting students go around picking up techniques and moves here and there but never really learn to discriminate between what is good or bad, what is appropriate or useless, what is truly effective or just for show. I hate to say this but it reminds me of going to a buffet where the food is only so good because it's a buffet. Largely, this is due to a wide-spread and common misunderstanding of how students should train.

In Aikido there is a very wide variation of techniques but in one's practice of their art and in each one we should be trying to express the single principle of Aikido in unlimited and infinite ways. However, what happens is that we express anything in any way we feel like – this is what I mean by “mish-mash.”

When preparing a meal, we try to select dishes which are in harmony with each other and complement each other. Generally, there is a theme according to the guests or occasion. Going to a buffet and eating anything on the table or whatever happens to be being served, we probably do not have a nice meal, just something to eat and fill up the stomach, nothing special or notable. This happens in Aikido also as what most people settle for in Aikido is “technique buffet” or “Aikido potluck.” They get a lot of quantity, but nothing really matches or compliments one another, and no single technique is very notable or great. In a very good meal, everything is carefully chosen and only the best ingredients are used. The taste is always checked and everything must be in harmony with everything else. Each dish can be different and unique but everything tends to blend together well and actually compliments and strengthens the taste of the other dishes. This is how we should create variations of technique in Aikido practice too.

When we put on clothes in the morning, we pick and choose which elements blend together and harmonize and complement each other. In Aikido and all traditional arts, there is a single thread, a main principle we are trying to express through our movement. We create harmony in most things we do because, as in cooking, it tastes better, and, as in our dress, it makes us look good and feel good too. Although I am very careful

about my Aikido, I always dress sloppy and don't pay a lot of attention to what matches well so no one ever recognizes me as an Aikido teacher.



Mish-Mash



by Rev. Kensho Furuya

can absorb and learn. Most of the time, I am not interested in what they can show me but I am interested in how they can take it to the next level or refine it to a higher degree.

Most of the time, I am not interested in how strong or fast they are but I am interested in how correctly they have mastered the fundamentals. Most of the time, I am not interested in what they have to offer me at the moment but I am interested in what they are willing to become through their training.

Sometimes, students may think that I am pushing them ahead from behind and all they have to do is take two giant steps forward to get ahead of everyone. No! I am trying to pull them forward from the front and trying to keep them from falling behind! We should never think that we are good because, as they say, there is always, without fail, someone better out there. A famous baseball player once said, “Don't ever look behind you; you might see everyone catching up to you!”

Sometimes the only difference between a student and a teacher is that one sees outcomes more clearly than the other. Just on this alone is what makes a teacher a teacher. I don't mean to see the future in a calculating way like an accountant or broker, but from a deep sense of faith and compassion for others. Dedicate yourself to your training and don't get mired in the mish-mash.

Editor's note: Furuya Sensei published this in a slightly different form to his Daily Message blog on May 1, 2002.

Even in our rooms, I think we try to make everything look nice and feel comfortable and everything seems to come together well. We should pay attention to this in our Aikido practice as well.

However, most people practice Aikido like I wear clothes – everything is cheap and nothing matches well. Many people say, “Your clothes look funny!” I say this same thing about many people in how they “wear” their Aikido.

What most students fail to understand is that most of the time I am not interested in what they know, I am interested in what they

UPCOMING EVENTS

行事

Dojo Coronavirus update:

The dojo is now fully open for indoors training with contact. The City of Los Angeles is on the verge of expanding its coronavirus indoor mandates. Please check our website for more updated information and how the dojo is adhering to these mandates.

- Your temperature will be checked upon entry.
- People with showing symptoms will not be allowed to train.
- Currently, LA County is requiring that all people vaccinated or not must wear a mask indoors.

The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles (ACLA) admit students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. The Furuya Foundation and the Aikido Center of Los Angeles do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender identification, national or ethnic origin or sexual orientation in administration of their educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.

Aikido Training Schedule

合気道 時間割

Saturdays

10:15-11:15 AM Regular Class
11:30 AM-12:30 PM Regular Class

Sundays

9:00-10:00 AM Children's Class
10:15-11:15 AM Regular Class
11:30 AM-12:30 PM Regular Class

Mondays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Tuesdays

No Class

Wednesdays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

Thursdays

No Class

Fridays

6:30-7:30 PM Regular Class

NOTE: Visitors are welcome to observe our Morning, Fundamentals, or Regular Classes.

*Last Saturday of the month is Intensive Seminar by Invitation only.

Iaido Training Schedule

居合道 時間割

Saturdays

8:00-9:00 AM Regular Class

Saturdays

7:45-8:45 AM Regular class

Wednesdays

7:45-8:45 Regular Class



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is the Official publication of the

Aikido Center of Los Angeles

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The Aikido Center of Los Angeles

has been awarded Official *Konin* recognition by the Aikikai Foundation, Aikido World Headquarters.

Our dojos are committed to the study and practice of the teachings of the Founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba and his legitimate successors, Nidai Doshu, Kisshomaru Ueshiba, the present Doshu, Moriteru Ueshiba and Hombu Dojo-cho, Mitsuteru Ueshiba.

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We are a not-for-profit, traditional Aikido dojo dedicated to preserving the honored values and traditions of the arts of Aikido and Iaido. With your continued understanding and support, we hope that you will also dedicate yourself to your training and enjoy all the benefits that Aikido and Iaido have to offer.

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